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background notes

The Holy See

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

April 1989

Official Name:
The Holy See

PROFILE

Geography and People

Area (Vatican City): 0.439 sq. km. (109 acres). **Population:** 1,000. **Ethnic groups:** Italian, Swiss. **Languages:** Italian, Latin, French. **Literacy:** 100%. **Work force:** 4,000.

Government

Type: Papacy; governmental and administrative capital of the Roman Catholic Church. **Independence:** Lateran Pacts regulating independence and sovereignty of the Holy See signed with Italy on February 11, 1929.

Suffrage: College of Cardinals elects pope for life.

Flag: Vertical bands of yellow and white, with crossed keys of St. Peter and papal tiara centered on the white band.

Membership in International Organizations

Permanent observer status at the UN and many of its specialized and related agencies, at the Organization of American States (OAS), and at the Council of Europe; membership in many others, governmental and nongovernmental.

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VATICAN CITY
ITALY
VATICAN CITY
0 500 1000 Feet
0 100 200 300 Meters
41°54'30"
VIALE VATICANO
VIA LEONE IV
VIA DI PORTA ANGELICA
ITALY
(Rome)
Papal Gardens
Wall
Vatican Museums
VIALE VATICANO
Civil Administration Building
ST. PETER'S SQUARE
Obelisk
Radio Station
Wall
Wall
Railroad Station
VIALE VATICANO
LARGO DI PORTA CAVALLEGGERI
Railroad
ITALY
(Rome)
41°54'00"
12°27'30"
12°28'30"

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GEOGRAPHY

The Vatican City occupies an area of 0.439 square kilometers (109 acres) containing the Apostolic Palace; St. Peter's Basilica; the Vatican museums, archives, library, and observatory; a number of administrative and office buildings; several apartments; and the Vatican gardens. Some 13 other buildings in Rome, as well as the Pope's summer residence at nearby Castel Gandolfo, enjoy extraterritoriality under the terms of the 1929 Lateran Pacts with Italy.

PEOPLE

Some 1,000 people actually live inside the Vatican's walls, most of whom are Italian or Swiss by nationality. Vatican citizenship is usually accorded only to persons who reside in the Vatican City by reason of office or employment and, with certain restrictions, to their families. Italian is commonly used, although official acts of the Holy See are drawn up in Latin.

The Pope delegates the internal administration of the Vatican City to the Pontifical Commission for the State of the Vatican City, headed by the Cardinal Secretary of State. The legal system is based on canon law or, if the canon law is inapplicable, on the laws of the city of Rome. The State of the Vatican City maintains a voluntary military force of Swiss Guards, as well as a modern security corps. It has its own post office, commissary, bank, railway station, electrical generating plant, and publishing house. The Vatican also issues its own coins, stamps, and passports. Radio Vatican, one of the most influential in Europe, is the official radio station. *L'Osservatore Romano* is the semiofficial newspaper, published daily in Italian, and weekly in English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and French (plus a monthly edition in Polish). The total Vatican work force is about 4,000.

HISTORY

The Holy See has sent and received diplomatic missions since the fourth century. For many centuries, the Popes held temporal control over the Papal States, which included a broad band of territory across central Italy, as well as the city of Rome. In 1861, at the time of the general unification of Italy, almost all of the papal lands were acquired by the Kingdom of Italy, following conquests by the Italian Army and popular plebicites. The Pope's sovereignty was then confined to Rome and its environs until 1870, when Rome itself was incorporated forcibly into the new Kingdom. In 1871, the Italian Parliament enacted the Law of Guarantees, which sought to assure the Pope's spiritual freedom, an income, and special status for the Vatican area. However, Pope Pius IX and his successors refused to acknowledge the validity of these laws, preferring instead to impose on themselves the status of prisoners in the Vatican. This situation lasted until February 11, 1929, when the Holy See and the Italian Government signed in the Lateran Palace the following three agreements regulating the dispute:

- A treaty recognizing the independence and sovereignty of the Holy See and creating the State of the Vatican City;
- A concordat fixing the relations between the government and the church within Italy; and
- A financial convention providing the Holy See with compensation for its losses in 1870.

A revised concordat, altering the terms of church-state relations, was signed February 18, 1984.

Pope John Paul II.

(White House photo by Cynthia Johnson)

The Holy See and the State of the Vatican City

The Holy See

The term "Holy See" refers to the composite of the authority, jurisdiction, and sovereignty vested in and exercised by the Pope and his advisers in the temporal and spiritual direction and guidance of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. Thus, the Holy See is the "central government" of the Roman Catholic Church. As such, the Holy See is an institution which, under international law and in practice, has a legal personality that allows it to enter into treaties as the juridical equal of a state and to send and receive diplomatic representatives. The Holy See has formal diplomatic relations with 119 nations, including the United States.

The State of the Vatican City

Vatican City is the physical, or territorial, base of the Holy See. Created in 1929 to administer properties belonging to the Holy See in Rome, the State of the Vatican City itself also possesses a personality under international law and enters into international agreements. It does not, however, receive or send diplomatic representatives. The United States and other countries do not, therefore, have diplomatic relations with the State of the Vatican City.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONS

Pope John Paul II, born in Poland, is the first non-Italian Pope in nearly five centuries. Elected on October 16, 1978, he succeeded John Paul I, whose reign lasted only 34 days. The Pope exercises supreme legislative, executive, and judicial power over the Holy See and within the State of the Vatican City.

The Pope rules the Holy See through the Roman Curia and its staff, the Papal Civil Service. The Roman Curia consists of the Secretariat of State, 9 Congregations (equivalent to Ministries), 3 Tribunals, 12 Pontifical Councils, and a complex of offices that administer church affairs at the highest level. The Curia is directed and coordinated by the Secretariat of State, under the Cardinal Secretary of State. The current incumbent, Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, is the Holy See's second-ranking official and is the equivalent of prime minister. Archbishop Angelo Sodano, Secretary of the Section for Relations With States of the Secretariat of State is, in effect, the Vatican's foreign minister.

Among the most active of the major Curial institutions are the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which oversees church doctrine; the Congregation

for the Bishops, which coordinates the appointment of bishops worldwide; the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which oversees all missionary activities; and the Pontifical Council of "Justice and Peace," which deals with international peace and social issues.

Three tribunals are responsible for judicial power. The Apostolic Penitentiary deals with matters of conscience; the Roman Rota is responsible for appeals, including annulments of marriage; and the Apostolic Signatura is the final court of appeal.

The Prefecture for Economic Affairs coordinates the finances of the Holy See departments and supervises the administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See (an investment fund dating back to the Lateran Pacts). A committee of 15 cardinals, chaired by the Secretary of State, has final oversight authority over all financial matters of the Holy See, including those of the Institute for Religious Works (the Vatican bank).

Principal Government Officials

Head of State—Pope John Paul II
Secretary of State—Agostino Cardinal Casaroli
Deputy Secretary of State—Archbishop Edward Cassidy
Secretary, Section for Relations with States, Secretariat of State—Archbishop Angelo Sodano
Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to the United States—Archbishop Pio Laghi

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on the Holy See. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

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Flamini, Roland. *Pope, Premier, President*. New York: Macmillan, 1980.

Graham, Robert A. *Vatican Diplomacy: A Study of Church and State on the International Plane*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.

Hanson, Eric. *The Catholic Church in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Jemolo, A.C. *Church and State in Italy, 1850-1950*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960.

Nichols, Peter. *The Pope's Divisions*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981.

Noel, Gerard. *Anatomy of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1980.

Oliveri, Mario. *The Representatives—The Real Nature and Function of Papal Legates*. Cross, England: Duren-Gerrards, 1980.

Wynn, Wilton. *Keepers of the Keys*. New York: Random House, 1988.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Holy See conducts an active diplomacy of great scope and variety. Its diplomatic corps is composed of well-trained and able professionals. It maintains formal diplomatic relations with 119 nations. More than 50 of these maintain permanent resident diplomatic missions accredited to the Holy See in Rome; the rest have missions located outside Italy with dual accreditation. The Holy See itself maintains nearly 80 permanent diplomatic missions abroad.

The Holy See is especially active diplomatically in international organizations. It has permanent observer status at the United Nations in New York, the Office of the United Nations in Geneva and specialized institutes, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in Paris. The Holy See also has a member delegate at the International Atomic Energy Agency and at the UN Industrial Development Organization in Vienna. It also maintains permanent observers to the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C., and to the Council of Europe. In addition, the Holy See has diplomatic relations with the European Community in Brussels.

The Holy See, in 1971, announced the decision to adhere to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in order to "give its moral support to the principles that form the base of the treaty itself." The Holy See is a signatory of the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

U.S.-HOLY SEE RELATIONS

The United States maintained consular relations with the Papal States from 1797 to 1870 and diplomatic relations with the Pope, in his capacity as head of the Papal States, from 1848 to 1868. These relations lapsed with the final loss of all papal territories in 1870.

From 1870 to 1984, the United States did not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Several recent presidents, however, designated personal envoys to visit the Holy See periodically for discussions of international humanitarian and political issues. Myron C. Taylor was the first of these representatives, serving from 1939 to 1950. Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan also appointed personal envoys to the Pope.

The United States and the Holy See announced the establishment of diplomatic relations on January 10, 1984. On March 7, 1984, the Senate confirmed William A. Wilson as the first Ambassador to the Holy See. Ambassador Wilson had been President Reagan's personal envoy to the Pope since 1981. The Holy See named Archbishop Pio Laghi as Apostolic Pro-Nuncio (equivalent to ambassador) of the Holy See to the United States.

Establishment of diplomatic relations has bolstered the frequent contact and consultation that has occurred between the United States and the Holy See on many important international issues of mutual interest. The United States values the Holy See's significant contributions to international peace and human rights.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Frank Shakespeare
Deputy Chief of Mission—James C. Creagan

The U.S. Embassy to the Holy See is located in Rome in the Villino Pacelli, Via Aurelia, 294. (tel: 639-0558). ■

Papal Audiences

The North American College in Rome, owned and operated by the US Catholic hierarchy for training American priests, handles all requests by US citizens for papal audiences. The address is Casa Santa Maria dell'Umilta, Via dell'Umilta 30, 00187, Rome, Italy (tel. 678-9184).

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